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CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FOLK-LORE OF NEW ENGLAND.

IN the year 1800 my father purchased one hundred acres of "wild land" in Grafton County, New Hampshire, lying upon the Connecticut River. For many years he struggled in the virgin forests, and paid for his farm ; afterwards adding to it, by purchase, other lots of land partially cleared. He endured many hardships of pioneer life, without much of a chance for education ; and it was not until the early settlers had paid for their farms, and had raised a surplus of produce, that any great interest was taken in educational matters. In such neighborhoods it was not strange that myths, belief in witchcraft, and reliance upon signs, should exist in a certain measure. Visiting among the neighbors was very common, particularly on autumn and winter evenings, without formality or invitation. Their "latch-strings were always out," and when the rap was heard at the door the almost invariable reply was, the welcome words : "Walk in." Conversation was on farming interests, politics, religion, neighborhood gossip, the "district school," and now and then a bit of folklore received their attention, and that, too, without any reserve.

My father's house stood on the west side of the main road, on a broad interval ; east of the road rose a high hill partly covered with evergreen trees, among which, only a few years before, roamed deer, black bear, and howling wolves. One of the most memorable and pleasant occasions in my youthful days was one winter evening, when some of our friends came in for a visit. The family occupied one large room, on one side of which was a large brick fire-place ; in this was a good roaring and snapping fire, which afforded sufficient light without any candles. Our family and friends sat in a semi-circle around the fire. There had just been a heavy snow-storm, and the trees were covered with snow. The full moon rose through the snow-laden evergreens, and shone brightly into our room through the east windows. Over the hard-wood fire, on the crane, hung a pot of bean-porridge, from which we all commenced our supper, each one stepping up and dipping out what one wished, and returning to one's seat in the semi-circle ; the last course being pumpkin-pie and cheese. Later in the evening we had popped corn, butternuts, apples, and cider. In the course of this rural visit several ghost and witch stories were related, half to keep up the conversation, and half to make those stare who might take stock in their genuineness. Some of those that were related, on that occasion and at other times, I will relate as I heard them.

A woman of the neighborhood was at my father's house one even-

ing, when some singular noise turned her attention to the subject of witchcraft, and I heard her relate, in substance, the following account: "I was out alone in the door-yard¹ one bright moonlight evening last summer, gathering up some chips to build a fire with the next morning, when I heard several female voices, talking and laughing merrily, apparently coming down the road. They seemed to be rapidly approaching, and I waited to see who they were; when they got near me, I could see no one, but they were heard directly overhead in the air: I looked up and saw nothing but the bright stars. I could hear their talking and laughing as they passed along overhead. Their voices grew fainter and fainter as they passed off in an opposite direction from whence they came, until I could hear them no longer."

This woman was free to state, with perfect confidence, that these voices were a company of witches going through the air to some unoccupied house to hold a frolic and have a dance. She believed they could go invisibly in spirit, separate from the body, and were possessed with muscular power, equal if not superior to that in the body, to perform any diabolical acts they might fancy. And, however decrepit they might be in the body, they were as lively and bouyant in the spirit as they ever were in their youthful days. She believed that witches had the power to disengage the spirit of an individual from the body, when found asleep or unawares, and could take that spirit along with them, when it would be perfectly under their control, and could be made to perform any service they desired; and sometimes such stolen spirits were made the butt of fun at their evening's entertainments at some haunted house. The spirits of those individuals would in all cases be returned to their own bodies before morning; and although the subjects may have slept soundly all night, they would be either sick or affected with great lassitude the next day. I have myself heard the question asked, both in sobriety and half in jest, if one "was rode" by witches the night previous. I have heard related that the witch throws the bridle upon the face of the sleeper, and then repeats an incantation before the spirit will disengage and be ready for a journey, and if the sleeper will only awake and throw the bridle upon the witch's face while she is repeating the incantation, her spirit is subdued, and must obey the will of the sleeper, and continue in that service until the bridle is taken off, or as long as her master or mistress shall remain silent; but if one word should be spoken aloud the witch is freed from servitude, and she is gone.

¹ Front yards were called "door-yards" in the rural districts in the country. They were large enough, so the wood was left there and chopped in the spring. The chips were left till the following summer, when they were picked up and burnt as they were wanted.

I was well acquainted with a farmer who had a large family of children : all believed in witchcraft. I have heard him relate the following story several times : One day in March he and his sons went to one of his neighbors, with a yoke of oxen, horse, and sled, for a load of hay. On their return they came to a bad place in the road, where the horse refused to go farther and laid down in the road. They tried various means to induce the horse to get up, but all in vain. After spending over one half day in the attempt, they suspected her being bewitched by a certain old woman who lived in the neighborhood, and the man seized an axe and attempted to kill the horse by beating out its brains. The skull was broken, and the horse was left upon the roadside till the next morning. Just at that moment the old woman had a bad spell, her head dropped to one side, and a doctor was sent for. She lived only a few days. In the mean time the family of the old woman sent down to the man's house for some favors, but they were all refused. He believed, if he should accommodate them in the least thing, that the old woman would recover, believing that he had struck the death-blow to the witch when he struck the horse. The next morning after, he went down to the horse and was surprised to find it alive. This survival he attributed to blows of the axe falling upon the witch instead of the horse. This man firmly believed that he struck the death-blow to the old woman when he struck the horse, and that she would have recovered had he accommodated the family with the least favor. He told this story with evident pride in his skill in gaining advantage over the witch.

BREVITIES.

Ringin in the ears or burning of the ears indicates that somebody is talking about one. (Northern Vermont.)

The birth of twin calves indicates death in the owner's family within one year. (Western New Hampshire.)

To cure hernia in a child, split a small tree, pass the child through the opening, bringing the halves together, and fasten with a string ; if the halves grow together as one tree, the hernia will be cured, otherwise it will not. (Vermont and New Hampshire.)

If a death occurs in the family of an owner of bees, they must be informed of the fact by addressing them in a loud voice in front of the hive ; otherwise they will die off, make but little honey, or produce no swarms. (New Hampshire.)

If one kills a snake by shooting it, that gun will ever after be likely to miss other game. If the first snake seen in spring is killed, that person will have good luck in killing others met with during the rest of the year. (Grafton County, N. H.) This last sentence alludes to the custom among early New England people of killing every snake that is met with.

When one is troubled with cramps, the toes of the boots should be turned towards the street at night, to cure the disease. (Orleans County, Vt.)

Timothy Boardman was an early settler of Rutland, Vt. He was engaged in privateering along the Atlantic coast during a portion of the Revolutionary period. On his cruises he kept a journal of important events and of the ship's log. After he settled in Rutland he used the blank leaves of these books to keep various accounts and note down various memoranda. The following rule for clearing land we copy in full:—

“Janr^y 1782 How to Clear Land. Girdle y^r Timber in the full of the Moon in June & full of Moon & Sine of the Hart in August To kill it Quick Jacob Safford.”

John McNab Currier, M. D.